Information Technology Resources Board (ITRB)

Strategic Plan

February 2001

Background

Information Technology (IT) is recognized as a fundamental tool to improve Federal Government operations and service delivery while reducing cost, streamlining processes and increasing efficiency. The Information Technology Resources Board (ITRB) is a group of skilled federal practitioners who, since 1993, have provided, independent, confidential assessments of IT programs and processes as requested by Federal Agency Executives.

The ITRB consists of 18 senior government IT executives, program managers and acquisition experts with proven experience developing, acquiring, and managing information systems. A list of current and former members is provided as Appendix A. Board members are drawn from both large and small, Federal civilian and defense organizations, such as the Department of Treasury, Department of Transportation, Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense. Together, their collective experience allows them to apply a broad and strategic approach to leadership, management, technical, and acquisition issues.

The primary role of the ITRB is to provide confidential peer reviews of major system initiatives at the request of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) or the sponsoring agency. The goals of the Board are to:

- Help agency management leverage information technology to improve mission performance and service delivery.

- Recommend opportunities for improving how the agency develops, acquires, and manages major systems.

- Assist OMB in the analysis and evaluation of risks and results of major information technology investments.

- Share information across Government on lessons learned from the information technology reviews.

The ITRB operating principles, listed below, ensure the integrity and validity of assessment proceedings, findings and recommendations.

Independence –	The assessments give the requesting agency a fresh perspective grounded in practical Federal Government experience. The ITRB is autonomous and self-sustained in that it does not rely on the direction or oversight of a "controlling" organization or on approval of its conclusions by the agency under review.
Confidentiality –	The ITRB handles agency documentation, interview data and internal discussions in strictest confidence. Assessment reports are provided only to the requesting agency and OMB. Board members do not discuss the assessment or its findings and recommendations with outside individuals, including the media.

Non-attribution –   Board findings are verified by multiple sources. However, information referenced in a report is not attributed to an individual. Assessment interviewees are therefore able to discuss what may be sensitive topics openly, without fear of embarrassment. The effectiveness and credibility of each assessment depends on the trust and confidence of the agency seeking peer review and advice from the ITRB.

Free to Requestor–   ITRB members' home agencies have committed to making up to 20percent of their time available to perform assessments and related duties. In addition, the Board employs experts from Government, academia, or industry to assist as necessary. The General Services Administration (GSA) provides administrative support to the Board. ITRB services related to an assessment are generally provided entirely without cost to the requesting agency.

Quick Turn Around –   Based on the program or project size and complexity, the ITRB will provide the requesting agency a timeframe for conducting the assessment. Generally the work is completed within three months; occasionally assessments have required six months.

Emphasis on Results –   ITRB assessments emphasize business results from the use of information technology. Reports and briefings focus on identifying and prioritizing issues, then recommend practical "next steps" for cost-effective management.

Qualifications –   ITRB members are drawn from senior management positions across the Federal Government. Each brings a diverse and unique skill set; collectively the members represent approximately 500 years of IT experience. The value and effectiveness of the assessments is enhanced by the ability of these Federal employees to speak as collaborating professionals rather than as individuals representing their home agencies.

Accomplishments

The ITRB provides a unique and practical way for Federal managers to identify solutions to actual or potential problems with major IT projects, and to intervene to get them back on track for success. Practical advice is conveyed in briefings to senior agency executives and in written reports. The ITRB has conducted 15 assessments and completed 13 formal reports. In addition to helping Federal program agencies the Board has provided services to OMB, the District of Columbia, and other Governments, such as the United Kingdom. Feedback has been positive. OMB recently advised agencies in the Federal Financial Management Report 2000, to seek the expertise of the ITRB as they plan IT projects.

Having no resources of its own to conduct this type of assessment, OMB relies on the ITRB for an expert, objective and expeditious second opinion. For agencies, the non-punitive and uncomplicated option of ITRB assistance can be far more palatable than an inspection or

audit. Resources are not diverted to defending earlier decisions, and agencies can concentrate on solving the problems and moving ahead.

From the beginning Board members have challenged the status quo and addressed complex and timely IT issues. The recommendations from the first report, issued by the Board's predecessor group in 1994, resulted in major reform legislation concerning IT management and acquisition.

The Board has conducted project assessments that include large-scale implementations of Commercial-Off-The-Shelf (COTS) products and complex systems development initiatives. ITRB assessments occur at critical points in the acquisition/systems development lifecycle such as major funding decisions or during planning for system deployment. The ITRB has also assessed agency efforts to implement capital planning, develop an enterprise architecture and acquire information technology contractually.

In one assessment, the ITRB found that a project's scope had grown dramatically out of control. This symptom highlighted the fact that the information technology programs were not aligned with the agency's strategic business vision. The situation was exacerbated by the agency's diverse missions, requiring a proactive communication approach with stakeholders who often had competing priorities. The ITRB recommended seeking a common set of expectations among the constituencies in an effort to realign the project's goals with the agency mission.

In another assessment, the agency involved had recently undergone major budget reductions and large-scale organizational changes. Because senior management was unclear about customer expectations, the agency had been unable to articulate a clear strategic view of the project and its role in the new environment. The ITRB recommended that the agency work with its external customers to develop a business plan, and that it publish a concept of operations to communicate how the proposed system would affect work processes in the future.

The ITRB encountered another project in which, after eight years of planning, the agency had yet to define an IT architecture. The project had come to rely heavily upon the functional program knowledge of the technical contractor, and there were not enough technical management resources in the government project office to provide timely decision making. The ITRB recommended that the organization establish technical requirements for deliverables, define modular delivery of specified interim products, monitor product development and generally strengthen the role of contract management.

At a critical juncture in another project, the ITRB found that although the information needs of key stakeholders were clearly identified, there was great difficulty in prioritizing these needs. The central project office simply did not have the resources or the authority to provide an enterprise-wide solution to the agency's de-centralized lines of business. Among other recommendations, the ITRB noted the need to establish an agency-level CIO who could focus the project's architecture on the most critical common needs of the different lines of business.

The ITRB recently completed a Government-wide assessment focused on the establishment, use and management of key interagency IT contracting vehicles. Although recent reforms improved the Government's ability to procure goods and services more quickly, concurrent improvements in our ability to plan and effectively manage acquisitions have been much slower. The opportunity to develop and share findings and recommendations with the broader IT acquisition community, including industry and congressional representatives, was productive. The holistic view of the ITRB results in a more integrated approach to Government-wide problem solving.

Another way in which the ITRB shares practical knowledge is by publishing documents based on the information compiled without source attribution during project assessments. The guides, listed below, identify effective practices, as well as those that should be avoided.

- Project Management for Mission Critical Systems
- Practical Strategies for Managing Information Systems
- IT Brain Drain: The Diminishing Pool of Skilled Federal Information Technology Executives
- Managing Information Systems: A Practical Assessment Tool
- Assessing the Risk of Commercial-Off-the-Shelf (COTS) Applications

The Future

Conduct agency-specific assessments of information technology projects.
The ITRB is committed to achieving better Federal IT management through peer reviews and knowledge sharing. As technology continues to advance and electronic government becomes a reality, the ITRB will continue to concentrate on the practical aspects of integrated service delivery to citizens.

Address common issues relating to the use of information technology.

The ITRB is in a unique position to work with multiple entities to understand and improve common business processes and functions across government. Some examples include e-Government and financial systems.

Leverage alliances among interagency groups.

The ITRB will continue to strengthen its working relationships with other interagency groups, such as the Chief Information Officers (CIO) Council, the Procurement Executives Council (PEC) and the Chief Financial Officers(CFO) Council. ITRB members contribute practical expertise on successful implementation techniques that provides the critical balance to the policy focus of these inter-agency groups.

"There will never be a better time to unleash technology. Go forth and do smart things."
Arnold Bresnick, Former ITRB Chair

APPENDIX A
Current ITRB Members

Sandra Borden	Coast Guard	
Kenneth Buck	GSA/FTS	
Brian Carman	DHHS/OIG	
Gary G. Christoph	HCFA	
Kay Clarey	Department of the Treasury	Chair
Wayne Claybaugh	SSA	Vice Chair
Joanne Ellis	USDA / NFC	
Jackie Fletcher	US Mint	
Ken Heitkamp	USAF / Maxwell	
George Hyder	OPM	
Myron (Skip) Kemerer	NRC	
Jean Lilly	IRS	
Frank J. Maguire, Jr.	DOD/JCS	
Eric Mandel	DOC//NOAA	
Emory Miller	GSA	
Bob Rodweller	FRB	
Martin Smith	US ITC	
Pam Woodside	HUD	

APPENDIX A (continued)
FORMER BOARD MEMBERS
(including precursor boards)

Kathy Adams	SRA	
Arnold Bresnick	Retired	Former Chair
Phil Brown	SRA	
Kenneth Byram	Deceased	
John Carabello	Deceased	
Tim Carrico	LMI	
Kevin Carroll	US Army	
John Cavallini	Dyncorp	
Mary Ellen Condon	SRA	Former Chair
Mark Day	EPA	
Renny DiPentima	SRA	Former Chair
BJ (Hong Fong) Freeman	DOJ/INS	
Don Fulford	CSC	
Christie Goodman	DHHS	
Nada Harris	TLA Associates	
Ted Harris	EPA	
Christopher Hoenig	Exolve, Inc.	
Shirl Kinney	Acquisition Solutions, Inc.	
Mike Laughon	Retired	
Chip Mather	Acquisition Solutions, Inc.	
Lloyd Moseman	SAIC	
Thomas Reddin	Retired	
Don .Simanton	CSC	
Tony Valletta	SRA	
Valerie Wallick	SAIC	Former Chair